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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH THAR ALLAH CHIEF SAYID YUSIF

REF: BASRAH 49

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging September 14 discussion between the Regional Coordinator (RC) and Deputy RC and Sayed Yusif al-Batat, leader of Thar Allah, Sayed Yusif said Basrah's security situation continues to erode. He said a majority of the population holds Coalition Forces responsible for the breakdown in security, but he said the ineffective Basrah Provincial Council is also culpable. The main instigators of violence, according to Sayed Yusif, are political parties and their patrons in municipal office. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Thar Allah leader Sayed Yusif, accompanied by his good friend MOD representative Majid al-Sari, met with the RC on September 14. (Note. It is difficult to see Sayed Yusif, and he only consented to meet after al-Sari intervened on the Regional Embassy Office's behalf. See reftel for background information. End note.) As an introduction, Sayed Yusif commented that the security situation in Basrah is becoming "worse and worse." Carefully couching criticism of the Coalition Forces, he said that most people blame them for all the bad things happening in Iraq and some believe that they perpetuate the violence against Iraqis. Though the RC explained why this notion is mistaken and that the Coalition Forces are trying to end the violence and terrorism, Sayed Yusif said, "people must pay for democracy, and perhaps the price for the Iraqi people is a civil war."

¶3. (C) The Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) is totally ineffective and cannot manage the security crisis, according to Sayed Yusif. Saying that the BPC is like an "orphan," so weak that it cannot do anything for itself, he declared that the BPC is too feeble to take important decisions. Political parties and corrupt officials are the main promoters of instability, Sayed Yusif said. When asked about whether he would claim his seat on the BPC, Sayed Yusif said that he does not want to join the council since it is so inept and he therefore does not want to be associated with it. (Note: Following the election in December of two BPC members to the Council of Representatives, Sayed Yusif is next in line to become a BPC member. His accession to the BPC is on hold, according to BPC members, because of legal difficulties relating to an outstanding warrant for his arrest. End Note.)

¶4. (C) On the issue of federalism, Sayed Yusif said that he is a proponent for it, adding that he believes it would unite Iraq. Though personally castigating Sayed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and calling him "insane," Sayed Yusif said that the nine province region that al-Hakim advocates is just an opening gambit. He cited an Iraqi proverb that one could obtain what one wanted by asking for too much and then settling for a lesser amount. Sayed Yusif said that with Basrah's economic potential, it could

be an "empire," and distinguished Baghdad from Basrah by saying that political decisions are taken in the former but economic decisions are made in Basrah.

15. (C) Comment. The conversation was long and rambling, with Sayed Yusif, punctuating it with questions about the United States. There also was much laughter, and it is obvious that Sayed Yusif is relaxed when he is in Majid al-Sari's presence. Sayed Yusif would not delve into any substantive discussions about Thar Allah, though he did say that Thar Allah has 17 offices in Iraq, mainly in the south, and that an office in Baghdad would open on September 16. Sayed Yusif's intense enmity towards Governor al-Wa'eli surfaced late in the meeting when Sayed Yusif blamed him for the death of his two young children and vowed to take his revenge. End comment.

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